



NEURO-CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SACRAMENTAL SYMBOLS

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Abstract: *The abiding grace of God still poured out to the hearts of the faithful even in the 21st century which is enhanced with information technology. This miracle happens through the Holy Sacraments, instituted by Jesus Christ. All these sacraments are entrusted to the Church by Christ. That is the reason why the classical definition states that the sacraments, the efficacious and visible signs are entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ. This academic paper entitled Neuro-Contextual Analysis of Sacramental Symbols is an attempt to analyze the Sacramental Symbols in the realm of Neuro-Context.*

Key Words: Neuro Context, Symbol, Sacrament

1. Introduction

The abiding grace of God still poured out to the hearts of the faithful even in the 21st century which is enhanced with information technology. This miracle happens through the Holy Sacraments, instituted by Jesus Christ. All these sacraments are entrusted to the Church by Christ. That is the reason why the classical definition states that the sacraments, the efficacious and visible signs are entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ. This academic paper entitled *Neuro-Contextual Analysis of Sacramental Symbols* is an attempt to analyze the Sacramental Symbols in the realm of Neuro-Context. The initial paragraphs will explore the nuances of the term Neuro-Context and the following paragraphs will provide a general outline how the sacramental symbols generate meaning to the faithful or how these symbols become meaningful in transcending the human mind to experience the divine grace. This academic paper also distinguishes the importance of *context* in sacramental meaning generation, preservation and transmission through sacramental language and it also analyses how the transmitted meaning gets deviation in its meaning in accordance with the contextual multiplicity. Therefore to particularize the topic, the Symbolic language is given more emphasis in this academic paper.

2. Neuro-Context

The term *Neuro-Context* has no direct connection towards Philosophy, whereas this term has to do with some neurological understanding on concept creation. Brain is the headquarters of analyzing and recording all the impulses triggered inside and outside brain. These impulses are generated by sensory experiences. It is through the sensation a living being gets the understanding on colour, taste, smell, dimensions, and shapes and so on. Once it is received it will be stored in the brain. Human brain has got the advanced capacity of manipulating the stored information and by those creating new combinations. Whereas other animals are not that much brilliant in using all the stored data in the way of creating new or forecasting what is going to happen few years later. Therefore 'Neuro-Context' can be defined as the sum total of received data, the neural ability to manipulate data to generate new knowledge, the ability to go beyond the data and at the same time to connect to the new context. It means that every second 'Neuro-Context' is widening its horizon and it lasts till death. Therefore it has got the following effect in the living being (here I include all creatures with a brain):

a. Configurative: Neuro-Context makes us around what we have², is going to have³ and what is with at present⁴.



- b. Distinctive: Neuro-Context is the real individual identity which enables us to be set apart from other.
- c. Dispositive: Neuro-Context enables us to receive new data to widen its context.
- d. Disputative: Neuro-Context enables us to ameliorate the meaning of every symbol by which we will be enabled to go beyond its limits.
- e. Obligatory: No one goes beyond Neuro-Context.

The term ‘Neuro-Context’ consists of two words: a). Neuro (Deals with visible brain and its visible and invisible functions) and b). Context (It refers to the temporal and special elements outside and at the same time inside the brain). It means that every day we are exposed to different experience and therefore the sum total of a day’s experience can be consolidated in the term ‘Context’. The Context which we receive at first is called ‘Prime Context’ and this prime context is expanded through the phenomena of *fusion of context* within the limits of the context. It is within this context a perception and sensory experiences are received. Therefore called *context of utterance, perception or act (CUPA)*.

3. Neuro-Contextual analyses of Sacramental Symbols

The Church is the continuation and the abiding presence of Christ in the world⁵. This abiding presence is made visible to the human sense experience through the visible signs- Holy Sacraments. Human brain requires data to analyse and to generate concepts for establishing true knowledge. In this case a rational understanding of the invisible and eternal presence of God and His grace are possible only through the signs⁶. These signs bring human mind beyond their limits with the help of Neuro-Context. Therefore such signs are symbols. As Paul Ricoeur defines, symbols have got the feature of suggestion, i.e. symbols itself become reality to the human mind.⁷ Before analysing the sacramental symbols, it is necessary to scrutinize some of the qualities of a symbol along with the function. A symbol guarantees hermeneutic of experience (which enables us to interpret experience accurately)⁸ and ensures a kind

of transformation to those who use or involve in it. It means symbols are special kind of signs because of the richness of consciousness they effect. Anything can be a symbol (i.e. Persons, thing, happenings etc. can become symbols). Every day the symbols expand the range of meaning and it remains as same in the appearance and utterance. Since I am dealing with the sacramental language as symbol here in this academic paper, I quote the Lord’s Prayer as the example. Even though the prayer remains the same, its meaning gets wider meaning in accordance with the spiritual disposition of the devotee. It is the result of the fusion of Neuro-Context. Symbol gets its meaning expanded and rejuvenated by the process of the expansion of Neuro-Context. That is a symbol is not just a bearer of information but a door opened to the unlimited meaning and experience. Therefore it can be true that a symbol not only directs to the reality but it itself is part of reality. And this particular state is understood by us on the basis of the fusion of the existing Neuro-Context with that of the encountered symbol. In this way every prayer in the sacraments

2.1. Language as Sacramental Symbols

Since the earliest times, the concept of symbolism has been prevalent in every human culture, social structure, and religious system. Linguistic signs as symbols play a vital role as objects upon which thoughts and prayers can be focused. They point a way through the spiritual world; act as badges of faith, teaching tools, and aids on the journey towards understanding complex philosophies.¹¹

In the case of sacraments, sacramental communication takes place through language (Symbol). The effect of such communication is the transformation in the person who receives and involved in the communication. In Christian sacramental economy, to receive God’s communication is to be transformed by it, i.e. God’s grace is active and potent in the otherness of the human person.¹² It means that the most used symbol in every sacrament is *language*. Here the language brings us to the heavenly experience. It is the context of utterance that brings change in the meaning of the sacramental



language. Language constitutes the entire structure of Sacraments and other symbols' meanings. Sacramental language goes beyond the literal meaning. For example, when we hear the utterance "lift up your heart" by the celebrant, no one will take their heart out of their body physically. Whereas the context of utterance is different and the particular collective Neuro- context (here Christian Neuro-Context) gives meaning to that particular utterance. When we think linguistically, the context of utterance means 'where the word or sentence is placed.' For example, take the word 'see' in the following two sentences: a). *God sees me* and b). *I see a tree*. The verb *see* is distributed in both sentences equally whereas the context of utterance is different. In the first example the verb *see* is placed between Metaphysical and Physical things, whereas in the second sentence the same verb is placed between that of same category (Physical things). Therefore the meaning of each sentence is entirely different, even though both of them seems alike linguistically. Now the first sentence is used in the context of a sacrament. The linguistic meaning of the same sentence transcends its own meaning to another realm, the realm of faith. Then there arises another issue on the subject of experience (Who is able to attain this meaning?). Here we come across the possibility of Neuro-Contextual analysis to address this issue. As I have stated in above paragraphs, Neuro-Context is the property of a particular person and at the same time it is connected to the same of others. For example, it is like generating a holistic idea of a palace by two individuals. One went inside of the palace and experienced all the internal structure, and shared it with the person out side in order to generate a complete idea of palace. In this case they have allowed the fusion of Neuro- context and generated a collective Neuro-Context. This collective Neuro-Context is preserved, transmitted to the posterity to expand the same. It means when we pray *God* , we are expanding the same collective Neuro-Context. In other words when I pray the same, I am fusing my unique Individual Neuro-Context (INC) with the collective Neuro-Context (CNC). It shows the inability of INC to go out of CNC, because INC is rooted in CNC. That is the reason why a person who does not see *a tiger* and *a horn*, find it

difficult to associate these two idea to visualize it as if it were one : i.e. This person will not understand when he hears the utterance *Do not imagine a horned tiger*. Whereas a person experienced these both terms will imagine *a horned tiger* and then negate its existence. It is the same with the sacramental language. We take a word which is related to an object and we separate the *quality* from that object in order to use it symbolically in the sacrament. For example when we pray *Let Thy blood wash my sins*, this symbolic language goes beyond the literal meaning in accordance with INC. If the INC is rooted in CNC of Buddhism and not came to know about CNC of Christianity, the entire meaning of the prayer changes. And still the prayer remains the same in the form. Therefore CNC is vital in forming language as symbols in the sacraments.

4. Conclusion

When we use the method of Neuro-Contextual analysis to analyse the language used in the sacraments, it is clear that CNC is rooted in the ground and has spread its branches in the sky. These branches are INC and these branches bear fruit (Divine experience) in accordance with their exposure to the light (Divine Grace) and with the ability to connect with the root (CNC). When a person attend a sacrament, he or she receives the grace automatically just as in the case of the branch and when he or she takes part in the same with the fusion of INC with CNC the sacrament becomes a divine experience.

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